

Testimony of Congressman
Collin Peterson
Before the Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans
Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives
May 23, 2002

Mr. Chairman: Thank you for allowing me to testify before your subcommittee regarding Marine Protected Areas. As a leader of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus, I recently introduced H.R. 3547, known as the Freedom to Fish Act, which is a bill that provides reasonable and responsible guidelines for the use of marine protected areas as a fishery management tool. It requires the involvement of the public in the development of these areas and ensures that recreational fishing will only be curtailed as a last resort.

For a long time, fishermen have supported temporary closed fishing seasons to allow fish populations to grow to optimum size. However, at the end of the closed season, fishermen rightfully expect these areas to be reopened in order to enjoy the benefit of their conservation efforts. When fishermen have a voice in the decision-making process, they can more readily support the conservation efforts being made.

The present rhetoric about marine reserves differs substantially from this tradition of involving recreational fisherman. Some advocates of marine reserves intend to close vast portions of the ocean to all forms of fishing on a permanent basis, including catch and release fishing that is now being practiced by an increasing number of Americans.

They want these massive areas declared off-limits to fishing without scientific proof that permanent no-fishing zones would actually produce more fish. To put it simply, the marine reserve movement seeks to exclude the American public from a public resource without scientific justification for doing so and without any input from the recreational fisherman who use it.

In addition, depending on the size of the areas to be closed, there could be significant adverse environmental effects by forcing fishermen from their historic fishing grounds and into other areas.

My Freedom to Fish Act would not prevent the Federal government from adopting any permanent no-fishing zones, but would ensure that fishermen would be actively involved in the decision-making process and that no areas would become a Federal marine reserve unless traditional fishery management programs could not provide for the conservation of the resource. H.R. 3547 would also provide that each and every marine reserve would be subject to review every three years and, based on those reviews, these no-fishing zones will be reopened whenever they fail to demonstrate positive benefits for the fishing public's enjoyment of our Nation's fishery resources.

Mr. Chairman, I would be pleased to answer any questions that you or any other member of the subcommittee may have at this time. Thank you.

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